DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 379 CS 217 406

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Soles, Derek |
| TITLE | Sharing Scoring Guides. |
| PUB DATE | 2001-03-15 |
| NOTE | 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (52nd, Denver, CO, March 14-17, 2001). |
| PUB TYPE | Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Higher Education; Holistic Evaluation; Scoring; *Scoring Formulas; *Scoring Rubrics; Student Evaluation; Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship; Writing Assignments; *Writing Evaluation; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes |
| IDENTIFIERS | Analytic Scoring; Teacher Student Conferences |

ABSTRACT

Composition theory and research indicate that, whether they use a holistic or an analytic rubric, teachers should share their scoring guide with their students. Both students and teachers benefit in substantial ways when students draft and revise their written work in the context of the rubric their teachers will use to assess student writing. Shared scoring guides might reduce writing apprehension, and they establish that most crucial educational relationship between teaching and evaluating. Shared scoring guides also act as something of a substitute for the individual teacher-student conference. Another benefit to teachers is that the use of a clear, shared rubric reduces student complaints about grades. Specific evaluative criteria should accompany every writing assignment a teacher gives to his/her students. Shared rubrics empower students--they urge students to become active participants in the writing process, and they substantiate the connections among teaching, learning, and assessment. (Cites 15 works.) (NKA)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 450 379

# Sharing Scoring Guides

**A Paper Presented at the**
**Conference on College Composition and Communication**
**Denver, Colorado**
**March 15, 2001**

**Dr. Derek Soles**
**Writing Program Director**
**Department of English**
**Wichita State University**
**Wichita, KS**
**67260-0014**
**(316) 978-6271**
**dxsoles@twsu.edu**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D Soles
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)



CS 217 406

## Sharing Scoring Guides

A scoring guide, also called a criteria scale, a feedback sheet, or a rubric, is a descriptive list of the criteria which teachers use to judge the quality of their students' written work. Analytic or criterion-referenced guides consist of a list of specific aspects of writing performance, often subdivided under main categories such as content, development, grammar, structure, and style. Student essays are graded based on the degree to which the essays match the criteria listed. Teachers typically deduct marks when an essay fails to meet a criterion. Holistic or norm-referenced scoring guides typically consist of a set of paragraphs, which describe the general qualities of outstanding, excellent, good, average, fair, and poor writing for a given assignment. Each paragraph on the holistic scale is numbered, the highest number corresponding to the paragraph that describes the attributes of an outstanding essay, the lowest describing the attributes of a poor essay. A student's essay is graded with the number of the paragraph that most closely describes the attributes of that essay. Composition theory and research indicate that, whether they use a holistic or an analytic rubric, teachers should share their scoring guides with their students. Both students and teachers benefit in many substantial ways

when students draft and revise their written work in the context of the rubric their teachers will use to assess student writing.

Students benefit primarily because they will write better essays if they understand the criteria their teachers will use to evaluate their writing. Research suggests a positive correlation between a student's knowledge of evaluative criteria and the grade the student gets on an essay to which that evaluative criteria is applied. Hillocks reviewed eleven studies done between 1963 and 1982 on the use of criteria scales and feedback sheets to improve student writing (156-160). Participants in the studies ranged in level from sixth grade to first-year college. In these studies, an experimental group was given a list of the criteria upon which a particular writing assignment would be judged; a control group was not. In most cases, teachers discussed the criteria with their students and encouraged them to comply with the criteria as they worked on their writing assignments. "Most of the studies involved found statistically significant differences between students using the sets of criteria and those taught through some other technique" ( 56). After reviewing the studies, Hillocks selected the best six, combined their results and evaluated these results statistically, using a sophisticated technique called a meta-analysis. He reports a mean effect size (a measure of overall difference in performance between experimental and control groups in all six studies combined) of a respectable .36. This rating makes the use of shared scoring guides the second most effective instructional strategy Hillocks investigated, second only to inquiry and ahead of sentence combining, model analysis, free writing, and grammar instruction.

In a well-designed study, Lamm investigated the efficacy of three instructional methods for teaching argumentative writing to college freshmen:

- the study of exemplary models of writing,
- the use of criteria scales, and
- revision which, in this study, involved using a criteria scale to revise a writing sample, which was not written by the students doing the revision exercise.

Two teachers used each of the three treatments in separate writing classes; in other words, six writing classes, a total of 102 students, participated in the study. Results of the study indicate that criteria scales are the most effective of the three methods studied for teaching writing. The effect size for models was 0.19; for revision, 0.48, and for scales 0.54. One instructor's Scales students registered a huge effect size, in excess of a full standard deviation (1.095). Lamm speculates that scales "may offer a better bridge [than models] from declarative to procedural knowledge" (6). In other words, the study of exemplary models of writing teach students what is effective and ineffective (declarative knowledge) but not how to make their own writing more effective (procedural knowledge). Scales do both. Lamm's study also indicates that female students benefit more from the application of scales to their writing than male students do. He also believes scales work especially well for argumentative writing, which makes more intellectual demands on students than other rhetorical modes do.

Wyngaard and Gehrke also experimented with the use of criteria scales to improve student writing. They used a type of analytic rubric, known as a primary trait scale, which focused on three aspects of effective writing: openings, focus, and "showing not telling." They described the qualities of excellent, good, adequate, and ineffective writing across each trait. They discussed the rubrics with their students and gave students written descriptions of the rubrics to help them assess their own work. Finally, they used the

rubrics themselves to assess the students' writing. Their study indicates that the use of rubrics is an effective way to improve student writing.

Stoddard and MacArthur found that shared scoring guides improved the narrative writing of learning-disabled students. The seventh- and eighth-grade students who participated in their study worked in pairs to assist each other in revising their writing. The rubric, which they used, prompted the students to examine and critique the parts, order, details, and clarity of each other's narratives (85). As the rubric indicates, the researchers were interested more in substantive rather than mechanical improvement to the students' writing. Students were thoroughly and carefully trained in using the rubrics effectively. Over the course of the study, student writing improved significantly, confirming the efficacy of the use of the rubric. "Improvement for individual students from baseline to posttest ranged from 2.6 to 5.5 points on an eight-point scale" (91).

Research also suggests that shared scoring guides facilitate peer conferencing and render it more effective than it is when students do not work with rubrics. In her summary of this research, Zhu (492-96) illustrates how peer conferencing appears to be most effective when students have clear criteria they can use to constructively criticize each other's writing. "Overall, successful peer response groups are task oriented, focus on the global features of writing, provide accurate and specific feedback for one another, and engage in negotiation" (496).

Zhu's own study of peer response groups compared a control group of students which received minimal training in peer response with an experimental group which was well-trained by composition instructors to respond effectively to peer writing. These instructors:

> made it clear that , when critiquing peer writing, peers should focus more on global concerns such as development of ideas, audience, purpose, and organization. Often, the teachers explicitly asked students to comment first on aspects related to the content and organization of the essay under discussion. When some students failed to do this and instead first commented on more local features such as grammar, language usage, and word choice, the teacher would briefly discuss students' feedback but would then using directives guide students' attention back to the global concerns....
>
> (502)

Instructors, in other words, helped students in the experimental group develop specific criteria which they could use to assess the writing of their peers. These experimental-group students were more effective peer evaluators than were their control group counterparts. "The experimental group provided significantly more feedback, significantly more feedback on global features of writing, and significantly more specific and relevant feedback" (509).

Research also suggests that shared scoring guides improve student performance on subsequent writing assignments. Teachers often complain that they painstakingly evaluate their students' writing, carefully making written comments and suggestions for improvement in the margins and at the end of the paper, only to see the same errors and lapses in style recur in subsequent assignments. A study by Clifford (in Hillocks) suggests that students who work with criteria scales transfer to subsequent assignments the skills in revising and editing which the scales fostered. Reviewing this study, Hillocks concludes

that "the active application of criteria and subsequent suggestions for improvement in their own and others' writing enabled the students to internalize criteria which then served as guides for their own independent writing" (158). The Stoddard/MacArthur study, discussed above, corroborates this finding . Stoddard and MacArthur speculate that students internalize the rubrics because they continued to write narratives of higher quality after working in peer conferencing sessions with criteria scales.

Shared scoring guides might reduce writing apprehension. Smith (in Hillocks 49-51) reviews research which indicates that students who are apprehensive about writing write less capably than those who have no or only slight apprehension about writing. Their compositions tend to be shorter and they use "significantly less intense language" (50) than students who are not apprehensive about writing. Their grades tend to be lower across the curriculum, and they tend to avoid majors which require a lot of writing. There is no research evidence to suggest apprehension would diminish if apprehensive students knew the criteria upon which their work would be judged, but such an outcome seems likely. If we know exactly what our audience expects, we are more secure about performing for them. Our profession could use a study which measures the effect of student knowledge of the criteria a teacher will use to evaluate their writing on the reduction in writing apprehension.

Shared scoring guides establish that most crucial educational relationship between teaching and evaluating. How we evaluate student work must be mediated by what we teach our students to do. Criteria scales mirror course content, consisting as they do of a review and summary of much of the material covered in a writing course. Analytic guides provide students with a point-form review and summary of the characteristics of writing

their teachers most value. Holistic guides provide students with clear paragraph descriptions of those features of written discourse which their teachers view as exemplary, clear descriptions of the characteristics of unacceptable writing, and clear descriptions of writing that falls somewhere between outstanding and unacceptable. Students always want to know what is expected of them: what they need to do to get a good mark, what they need to avoid to prevent a low mark. They want to know how what they have learned relates to how they will be graded. Scoring guides provide students with this information; they establish that crucial connection between the teaching and the evaluation of writing.

Shared scoring guides encourage students to be active participants in the writing process. If their work will be judged analytically and if they have the analytic guide, students can work back and forth between their drafts and the checklist as they write and revise their work, checking off the items on the guide when they feel their essay meets those criteria. If their work will be judged holistically and if they have the holistic guide, students can try to match their work to the high-rated descriptors while avoiding the pitfalls described in the low-rated ones. The rubric tells students what they need to do to write a good essay and motivates them to meet the criteria for good writing their teacher has established for a given writing assignment. It is difficult for students to remain detached and unengaged when they have before them the evaluative criteria their teacher will apply to their writing assignment; the criteria urges them to get in the game.

Shared scoring guides force a sense of audience onto student writers. Recent composition theory has emphasized the crucial role the reader plays or should play in the writing process. Richard Fulkerson, for example, argues that a rhetorical axiology, which

privileges the role of the readers, emerged in the 80's as the favored approach among influential compositionists. A rhetorical axiology is based on the belief that writing is a social process, that the purpose of writing is to connect with a "discourse community," that readers influence and shape the content and style of a writer's work. "Good writing, the sort of writing that we hope to enable students to produce, is contextually adapted to, perhaps even controlled by, its audience (or discourse community) addressed of invoked or both" ( 417). Josephine Tarvers, similarly, notes that the "social-constructionist theory of the writing process" and its paired term, "collaborative learning," currently dominate writing theory and pedagogy (p. AIE-3). Shared scoring guides emphasize the importance of the reader's role in the composing process in that they prescribe those qualities readers will value as they read and judge a writer's work. They impel students to consider their audience as they write, and the research suggests that their writing will be better as a result.

The use of shared scoring guides complements, as well, radical composition theory which emerged in the 1990's, as an important contribution to the discipline, as composition/rhetoric specialists adapted to their field approaches their colleagues in literary theory and analysis had used for some years. Radical composition theory is primarily Marxist and/or feminist. Marxist composition theorists like James Berlin believe that power is inequitably distributed among cultures and social classes and for democracy to prevail, and for viable learning to occur, power must be redistributed. In a writing class, the teacher has more power than students have. Teachers can render writing instruction more effective and more authentic by sharing some of that power. Obviously control over grading is a primary source of teacher power, so teachers who share their

evaluative criteria with their students are, at least in part, finding a pedagogical application for Marxist theory. Feminist composition theorists like Dale Bauer, Elizabeth Flynn, and Catherine Lamb advocate a feminist pedagogy based upon feminist principles. Essentially, they reject a stereotypically male approach to education based on intellectual independence, competition, and individualism in favor of a more cooperative and collaborative approach. The popularity of peer response as an instructional strategy in the writing classroom is, in part, a result of the influence of feminist educators. The shared rubric certainly fosters this atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration feminist educators value. Shared scoring guides are Marxist in their insistence that teachers share their power as evaluators; they are feminist in that they champion the pedagogical benefits of cooperation and collaboration.

Teachers also benefit from sharing their scoring guides with their students. The Wyngaard and Gehrke's study, discussed above, indicates that teachers who share evaluative criteria with their students reported that it took less time than usual for them to grade their students' work and that the evaluation process was more useful and relevant to their students (70). This conclusion, of course, stands to reason. As the research cited above suggests, students write better essays when they own the evaluative criteria, and good essays, as all English teachers know, take less time to grade than bad essays. Moreover, we can process, decode, and evaluate information that we anticipate, that has a recognizable context, more effectively than information that has only a vague context. The shared scoring guide provides teachers and students with that shared context or, at least, reminds students of the context within which their teachers expect them to

communicate. If they're on the same wavelength, a reader and a writer communicate more effectively.

Shared scoring guides also act as something of a substitute for the individual teacher-student conference. Most English teachers want to conference with each of their students at least once while students are writing and revising an essay in order to monitor the students' progress, offer advice, and recommend revisions. Indeed, a study by Freedman indicates that English teachers rate the one-on-one conference as the most effective method of teaching writing. But a teacher with a hundred students doing four or five writing assignments in a semester barely has the time to conference once with each student in one semester (Freedman). A shared rubric presages much of the advice a teacher would likely give in a one-on-one conference. If teachers review the rubric with their students while the students are drafting and revising, there is at least some whole-class conferencing occurring. It is not as effective, obviously: hard copy of a list of some rules is not going to be as beneficial as a teacher taking time with each student to review the specific writing issues with which each student is struggling. But individual conferences for a class of twenty-five students will take well over six hours. Given the amount of material to be covered in a contemporary writing class, and given the typical writing teacher's workload, the considerably more efficient must trump the slightly more effective instructional strategy.

A third benefit to teachers is that the use of a clear, shared rubric reduces vexatious student complaints about their grades. Of course, any good teacher will respond willingly and openly to those students who want further explanation about the errors they made and those who want advice on how to improve subsequent writing assignments. But there are

always those assertive students who want a higher grade, who demand to know exactly where, why, and how they lost every point their teacher deducted from their essay, and who threaten to take their paper to the department Chair unless such specific explanation is provided to them. Such explanation is easier to provide when teachers have a scoring guide to refer to as they discuss the essay with the student and justify the grade they assigned to it. More to the point, there are fewer such complaints when students know exactly what is expected of them.

Specific evaluative criteria should accompany every writing assignment a teacher gives to his or her students. Teachers can use one of the many rubrics found within the professional literature on response or, better, design their own, perhaps using an existing rubric as a guide and model. Different types of assignments require different types of evaluative criteria: the characteristics of a persuasive essay, for example, are different from the characteristics of an effective narrative. Rubrics should also be used in peer response. Such rubrics are often framed in the form of questions: Is the essay interesting and informative? Does the essay have a beginning, a middle, and an end? Is there a thesis? Are the paragraphs developed in enough detail? Is the writing clear? Does it flow? The rubric should complement both the assignment or the activity and their rhetorical contexts.

Secondary and college writing teachers might also consider the benefits of soliciting student input in the design of the evaluative criteria to be used for a given assignment. Lee Odell recommends students take an "active role in establishing the criteria by which their writing is to be judged" (295). Writing teachers assume students understand terms like "organized," "perceptive," and "logical," when, in fact, student and teacher definitions of these terms might differ. Writing teachers must take the time to explain, discuss, and

define these terms with students and within the context of a particular writing assignment. When evaluative criteria are clarified, established cooperatively, and shared, students know exactly what is expected of them and they will better understand the way their work is graded. "In all cases, the evaluation process must continually engage both teachers and students in trying to figure out what criteria are specifically appropriate for the task at hand" (p. 295).

Edward White, in his readable book *Teaching and Assessing Writing*, recommends writing teachers share their scoring guides with their students early in the writing process, "so that they know from the outset the standards for judgement to which they will be subject" (19). Like Odell, he also suggests that teachers solicit input from their students in the design of the scoring guide. "Teachers who use scoring guides in this way spend more time working with students as they write their papers, since the standards for performance are clear and public and the students are more ready to seek help in meeting them" (19). When students have the scoring guide, they feel included. They feel they are collaborating with their teachers in achieving the goals of the course. This sense of inclusion is heightened further when students have a hand in developing the scoring guide. They have a real sense of responsibility to try their best to meet the criteria which they have helped establish, in the same way workers who own the company will work harder to make the company viable. Effective writing teachers, White argues, include criteria scales with their assignments. "The students should receive a description of the purpose of the assignment, its format, and the criteria that the teacher will use in responding to it" (25).

Research, reviewed above, indicates that students who know the criteria upon which their work will be evaluated write more effectively than students who do not own that

criteria. Will writing performance improve even more if students have a hand in designing the evaluative criteria? Will such students write more effectively than students who have simply been given a prescribed rubric? There is, as yet, no research which ventures to answer that question. Our profession needs a study comparing the effect on student writing of a prescribed rubric with the effect of a rubric students have had a share in designing.

We do know that the use of shared scoring guides is an effective instructional strategy in the composition classroom. Indeed, composition theory and research suggest that every writing assignment that is going to be evaluated, assessed, and/or graded should come with its own rubric, which explains clearly the specific criteria upon which the writing will be judged. Teachers should explain and discuss the rubrics, whatever type they choose, carefully with their students. Placement tests should include the grading criteria and proctors should extend by a few minutes the time they spend going over the instructions for the placement essay, so they can explain and discuss the rubrics with students who are writing the placement essay. Rubrics should be used in peer conferencing sessions to provide a clear focus for students to constructively critique each other's work. Students, especially in higher grades and college, should write better essays, take the writing process more seriously, and enjoy writing more if they are allowed to participate in the design of the criteria scale. The use of shared scoring guides complements the current thinking of some of our leaders in the English education community. Shared rubrics empower students, they urge students to become active participants in the writing process, and they substantiate the connections among teaching, learning, and assessment.

Works Cited

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." In Victor Villanueva Jr. (ed.) *Cross Talk in Comp Theory*. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1997. 589-619.

Bauer, Dale M. "The Other 'F' Word: The Feminist in the Classroom." *College English* 52 (1990): 385-96.

Berlin, James. "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." In Victor Villaneva Jr. *Cross Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader*. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1997, 679-700.

Flynn, Elizabeth, A. "Composing as a Woman." *College Composition and Communication* 39 (1988): 423-35.

Freedman, Sarah Warshauer. *Response to Student Writing*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1987.

Fulkerson, Richard. "Composition Theory in the Eighties: Axiological Consensus and Paradigmatic Diversity." *College Composition and Communication* 41 (1990): 409-29.

Hillocks, George, Jr. *Research in Written Composition: New Directions for Teaching*. Urbana, Illinois: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills and the National Conference on Research in English, 1986.

Lamb, Catherine E. "Beyond Argument in Feminist Composition." *College Composition and Communication* 42 (1991): 11-24.

Lamm, Robert Lawrence. *Primary Trait Scales, Revision, and Models: The Effects of Eight-Week Foci on Instruction on the Quality of Argumentative Essays Written by*

*First-Year College Composition Students*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 1994.

Odell, Lee. "Writing Assessment and Learning to Write: A Classroom Perspective." In *Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing: Re-thinking the Discipline*. Ed. Lee Odell. Carbondale" Southern Illinois University Press. 289-313.

Stoddard, Barbra and Charles A. MacArthur. "A Peer Editor Strategy: Guiding Learning-Disabled Students in Response and Revision." *Research in the Teaching of English*, 27 (1993): 76-103.

Tarvers, Josephine. "The Composing Process: An Overview." *Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers*. 3rd ed., Annotated Instructor's Edition by Lynn Quitman Troyka. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1993.

White, Edward M. *Teaching and Assessing Writing*. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1994.

Wyngaard, Sandra and Rachel Gehrke, "Responding to Audience: Using Rubrics to Teach and Assess Writing." *English Journal*, 85.6 (1996, October): 67-70.

Zhu, Wei. "The Effects of Training for Peer Response on Students' Comments and Interaction." *Written Communication*, 12 (1995): 492-528.